

THE SOUND BREEZE, Saturday, September 12, 1903.

THE EXHIBITION OF THE PAINTERS OF LYME

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(Written by Request)

Last weeks' display at the Library naturally has developed an extension of interest from the pictures to questions of "tonality" and "method," the meaning of quality and the significance of the "Lyme School". To persons though slightly acquainted with picture exhibitions, the impression of singular harmony must have been apparent in the collection which adorned the Library walls. This harmony resulted from the employment of a single method in all save one of the pictures and this one, though exotic, had much in common with the others as will be shown. The school of Lyme is a group of painters brought together over the idea of tonality. There is nothing new in this, it being a heritage from the old masters but one which in the shrifts of experiment and the search for the "new thing" was left unsustained save by a slender line touching hands with the colorest of the golden age of painting.. One may trace the lineage of Tone from Van Eyck through Rubens, Titian, Velasquez to Cuyp and Claude Lorraine, thence to England where it was nurtured by Constable and Reynolds, back to France to be strengthened by Rousseau, Diaz, Dupri, Corot and the painters of 1830, thence to America developed in the work of Geo. Inness, Wyant and Fuller.

Of the few men who received it of them none have been more willing to impart the real knowledge of it than the founder of the school of Lyme. Mr. Ranger has no secrets, and taking the broad ground that the more good pictures were produced in this country the more pronounced would be claim of American art, he has sought by influence and advice to turn the tide of the sudden development of American landscape into the sound and sober channel of tonality. Artists who have thought with him have come hither both by invitation and gravitation. The school of Lyme was therefore founded on an idea backed by a personality and is maintained by the conviction declaring this one thing we do, and therefore does not represent a haphazard coterie of artists drawn together by the attractions of this locality. Without the idea, the locality would have yielded naught save subject to the art of this country. But what is the distinction of this set of painters whereby is suggested any difference between them and others; what is "tonality" of which they prate and make much of; why do museum directors, art dealers and connoisseurs, not to mention the ubiquitous newspaper man, come up from town to see their show?

The difference between their work and that of many other artists could be more easily seen than described, those pictures having little tone fading into flatness under comparison. They may, by virtue of detail, represent more faithfully the true tints of nature, but not the true impression; for nature is always expressive of that depth and strength which lies far in, and it is that quality which the tonist insists to render. To him it is that something which, like salt in the definition of the small boy, makes things taste bad when you don't put any on.



Technically it means the labor of many repaintings, of color glazes even to obliteration of what has been created until the work takes on that unctuousness of depth and strength by which one experiences the same thrill as through the deep reverberation of a musical tone from many instruments.

Practically it is the pulsation of color in every part of the picture. What by the impressionist is produced by the juxtaposition of pure pigment in little lots or stripes is by the tonist felt by either the play of one color through another or by such broken colors as may be administered by a single brush stroke loaded with several colors, or by a single color so dragged across another as to leave some of the under tone existent.

The picture by Mr. Hassam exposes the effort of all tonal painters, expressing frankly by the use of smaller methods what they aim at with bigger and clumsier ones. A microscope over any part of nature proves that the theory is all right and it becomes a question for the individual to decide whether or no he prefers to tell the time while he watches the movement of the works or will take these for granted if he gets the result. The decision must be personal.

But this depth of nature, this vibration of parts, the synthesis of many things to produce the whole; by which method do you get it best, for this is what we are all after!

The significance which lies in the turning from academic methods, as in the case of Messrs. DuMond, Beal, Foote and Voorhees and the tenets of Impressionism as with Mr. Dessar, or the most brilliant possible rendition of light formerly seen in the landscapes of Mr. Talcott is a plain declaration for a method which obtains that something which former means denied. The past art of all of these men has received due recognition, that of Mr. Dessar in the range of figure and portrait painting, of Mr. DuMond in classic and religious composition. Mr. Howe left behind him in France a well earned reputation attested in the ribbon of the Legion of Honor and of all the group he has been the most conservative of those methods which have proved successful to him. Mr. Dawson as one of the best experts in the country of the secrets of the early masters is of course a deep dyed-in-the-wool tonist, and Mr. Minor has been pegging away along these lines all his life.

The tonal idea so captivated and suited the temperament of Mr. Cohen that he willingly crosses the ocean to where it is best fostered, and his picture attests how fully he has realized its possibilities. It has that 'cheesiness' of surface which for a better word Reynolds declares to be the sign of a good tone picture, such a surface in short "as one could wish to eat."



Mr. Davis shows less of this quality but has handled his subject in that light and touchy manner, the charm of which is easily destroyed by too much over painting. Indeed, both of these paintings recall Corot and each from different view points. Here then we have a small group in which each one is individual and all supporting that great fundamental notion concerning nature's depth and painters tone, the one the compelling sequence of the other.

Had Messrs. Bogert and Wiggins been represented the exhibition would have been strengthened by two of the best tonists of the country. They will come to Lyme later.

The history of art developement is a history of coteries, seldom of individuals. Thus have the Pre-Raphaelites, the Luminarists, the Rose Croix, the school of Glasgow and Fontainebleau, small groupes in every case, fostered certain types of the painter's art which, founded on abstract convictions, now stand for concrete ideas.

How few Americans there be who are aware of the high place which American landscape art holds in the mind of the foreign artist and critic! It is now not only acknowledged by fair minded writers abroad, that the best landscapes are produced here, but it is mooted that if things keep on going as they have been going, the centre of the world's art will not long hence be found on this continent. What place, in time, will be given to the little movement slowly growing in this center or what significance may attach thereto, who can tell? The school of Fontainebleau has passed with the last of that splendid band of painters, but by singular coincidence, in a territory strikingly like to that which gave inspiration to the art of those men, the seeds which it produced, here transplanted, are springing forth in the soil of the new country. Time will tell whether or not it has found its depth of earth. In one respect, the newer movement in tonality is supplied with a long advantage beyond that of the "Men of '30;" the endowment of Impressionism. Freed from the conventions which beset those older landscapists, they may escape the blackness which a false notion concerning bitumen has produced and may now build a new thing in the light of both precept and warning. It should be a union of the convictions of Titian and Rosseau.

Henry R. Poore